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Alumna Ashley Gerald Surprised with Milken Educator Award

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Friday, April 29 was another normal day for students and employees of Lusher Elementary School in Florissant, Mo. But for one faculty member, it was a day she will never forget.

Ashley Gerald, a two-time alumna of Lindenwood University, and behavior interventionist at Lusher was surprised with a Milken Educator Award from the Milken Family Foundation in front of the whole school at a surprise assembly. Missouri Commissioner of Education Dr. Margie Vandeven and Milken Educator Awards Vice President Stephanie Bishop surprised Gerald at a stop on the coast-to-coast awards presentation tour.

The Milken Educator Awards was conceived by Lowell Milken to celebrate, elevate and activate the teaching profession. It is the nation's preeminent teacher recognition program and often hailed as the "Oscars of Teaching." For 35 years, the Milken Family Foundation has devoted over \$140 million in funding to the Milken Educator Awards, including \$70 million in individual Awards to more than 2,800 recipients plus powerful professional learning opportunities and networking with leading education stakeholders.

"I help students that are struggling in class to develop strategies for success. I have a caseload of students who we check-in with. Sometimes it's a push in where we're whispering encouragement in their ear to have a great day, sometimes it's recalling goals that they've set for themselves or that we've worked on together," said Gerald. "I really love trying to meet the students where they're at... getting to know them and figuring out what their needs are beyond the academic portion of school is what's important. Because once you meet them where they are and give them what they need, they'll try to give you everything they've got."

No stranger to the classrooms, Gerald's years at Lindenwood contributed to her career path and her personal experiences encouraged her to pursue her passions.

As an undergraduate, one of Gerald's professors identified an opportunity for supporting success her, and the professor's actions and encouragement helped Gerald succeed. "She took my hand and helped me through, and I will

never forget that. But having a professor to reach out and keep me grounded and push me through kind of solidified what I wanted to do with my students as I moved into my career,” Gerald shared.

Gerald’s passion for serving her students blossomed from the real experience she had at Lindenwood, teachers who loved her, saw her potential, and believed in her. Now, Gerald enriches the lives of her students and promotes real success every single day.